

Colorado and Vermont Peer-to-Peer Exchange

Short and Long-Term Methods for Mitigating Flood Erosion Hazards

Mike Kline, Vermont Rivers Program Manager

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Colorado and Vermont are very different places, but recent disastrous floods have shown they share something in common: *flood-related erosion*. Settlements and roads in steep, narrow valleys plus lots and lots of rain equals severe damage and misery. Mountainous municipalities and states, trying to address fluvial erosion hazards, have begun to turn to each other as our nation has yet to programmatically move beyond the mitigation of flood hazards associated with inundation.

The Resilient Neighbors Network (RNN), sponsored by the Natural Hazards Mitigation Association (NHMA), is playing a key role in the peer-to-peer exchange between jurisdictions dealing fluvial erosion hazards. This past week, at the annual workshop of the Natural Hazards Center and the NHMA Practitioners Symposium, I was in Bloomfield, CO joining other charter community members of the RNN by way of a grant from FEMA. The Workshop gave Coloradans and Vermonters an opportunity to meet face-to-face and exchange experience and information on their current flood disaster recoveries and erosion hazard mitigation efforts.

In the springtime RNN leaders urged the NHMA to include a session in the Practitioners Symposium on “*Mitigation in Short and Long Term Recovery: Colorado and Vermont Case Studies.*” This turned out to be a successful session as we talked about the challenges of funding during recovery, river and land use mitigation practices, challenges unique to small mountain communities, and how to be more proactive vs reactive. The audience had many questions and the session felt like it ended just as it was starting. In the days leading up to the session, Vermont and Colorado representatives took many opportunities at meals and in the hallways to carry-on a conversation about the challenges we faced in our recoveries and within our unique jurisdictions.

Having this opportunity as part of the Resilient Neighbors Network has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my professional career. Because Vermont has a federally declared flood disaster every year and a major statewide disaster on average every 14 years, our small state has been working for over a decade to develop its own brand of a fluvial erosion hazard mitigation program. Recovering from Tropical Storm Irene would have been harder and our resiliency looking forward would be dim were it not for the programmatic changes we had put in place thus far. The RNN and the NHMA gave me the opportunity to share this body of work with another state that is in the midst of asking many of the same questions Vermont has been working to address.

On my first morning in Colorado, eleven of my peers came to the Workshop location in Bloomfield representing the Colorado Governor’s Recovery Office, several Departments of Colorado State Government, and the EPA and FEMA Region 8 offices. Having been attracted by some of our Vermont publications, they spent 2 hours asking me questions about the Vermont Program and sharing their own Colorado experience. Contact information was exchanged, documents are being mailed, and they are eager to have me back to Colorado this year to address other recovery symposia.

I have shared information with other jurisdictions before, but the idea of formalizing peer-to-peer exchange through the RNN was just a concept I was willing to try. This is now very tangible to me. I feel certain that I have been able to help or at least commiserate with far away communities. The opportunity to meet and talk with peers **face-to-face** makes a world of difference. I now envision many years of RNN work between Colorado and Vermont.